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Book review

Martindale: The Complete Drug Reference 38th edition. Pharmaceutical Press (June 2014)., ISBN: 978 0 85711 139 5

I realised I was embarking on a daunting task when I started reviewing the latest edition of Martindale: The Complete Drug Reference (38th Edition). Weighing in at just over 6 kg with 4160 pages of detailed drug monographs, this desktop behemoth is more than just a formulary. It is an extensive, detailed reference about any drug you could possibly think of using.

In the preface, Martindale is defined as more than just a 'simple encyclopaedia of medicines'. It is an unbiased source of information about drugs for health care professionals around the world. The primary aims, as stated in the preface, of this textbook are:

1. To summarise clinically useful information on all drugs and medicines around the world.
2. To provide accurate, unbiased, and reasonably comprehensive information in a concise format
3. To provide a lead-in to the published evidence base from which we derive the information.

This latest edition of Martindale: The Complete Drug Reference (Volume A) contains more than 6000 drug monographs in 49 chapters. Each chapter is divided into subheadings which include drug types and diseases, making it also a useful clinical tool for the treatment of individual conditions. Each monograph is detailed and carefully researched and contains references to the most important literature supporting its content. An unrivalled breadth of international coverage and detail of information makes this formulary one of the best on the market. Information on herbal agents and toxins have been added to this edition, which is not usually included in other drug reference books and formularies.

The content has been written and approved independent from the influence of the pharmaceutical industry, making it internationally useful. The monographs have sub-headings making navigation easy and intuitive:

1. Nomenclature. This opening section to each drug has detailed information about the different names of the drug as well as synonyms and commonly used abbreviations. Street and slang

names of drug of abuse are also included, as well as Chemical Abstract Service (CAS) registry numbers, Anatomical Therapeutic Chemical (ATC) classification system codes, unique ingredient identifier (UNII) codes and atomic and molecular weights.

2. Uses and Administration
3. Adverse Effects
4. Treatment of Adverse Effects
5. Precautions
6. Interactions
7. Pharmacokinetics

The second volume includes details over 180,000 proprietary preparations, their active ingredients and indications as determined by the manufacturer. There is also a directory of manufacturers with their contact details, an index of pharmaceutical terms in various European languages and a general index that should be the first point to access when trying to find a specific drug. The second volume finishes with a Cyrillic index with entries covering drugs and proprietary preparations.

Even though this edition has been printed in a bigger font, it is still quite small and at times challenging to read. However, the page layouts have been redesigned from previous editions to make for easier reading. The books are bulky and difficult to carry around, making it an excellent desk reference for casual consultation. It will be an invaluable source of information for clinicians, pharmacists, pharmacologists and toxicologists and anyone interested in researching all there is to know about a certain drug. An online version is also available, but is not included in the purchase of the hardcover version.

Conflict of interest

None declared.

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